

Executive Summary

Dr. Lawrence Harrison, "Culture Matters"
Point Four Conference Room
April 30, 2003

On April 30th USAID hosted Dr. Lawrence Harrison to discuss his work and the multi-sectoral study he is currently coordinating looking into the effects of culture on development. Dr. Harrison concludes, based on his experiences in development, particularly in Latin America, that progressive cultural values are the determining factors of the success of economic development and the promotion of democracy.

Dr. Harrison draws a number of deductions based upon this conclusion:

- Culture changes slowly, but it might be possible to accelerate this change
- There is no single action or intervention that can be done to significantly transform countries/cultures
- Education, particularly increases in literacy levels and especially increases in women's literacy plays a key role in transforming cultural values
- Media, news and entertainment channels must take a more responsible role in society in the images and values they promote
- Centrality of religious reform, particularly for women's rights and support for free market
- Leadership is key in development, cultural change can not be imposed from the outside it must respond to domestic demand, the role of intervention is to facilitate this process not to be the catalyst

Introduction

On April 30, 2003, PPC invited Dr. Lawrence Harrison to discuss the book he co-edited, Culture Matters, and the new research project that he is currently coordinating about the relationship between culture and development. Dr. Harrison recounted how the success of the Marshall Plan compared to the failure of the Alliance for Progress caused many people, including himself, to come to the realization that since the methods used were similar in both interventions the difference in cultures must be responsible in part, for the contrary results observed. Western European values, attitudes and institutions were congenial to economic development, democratic governance and social justice while those in Latin America were not to the same degree.

Culture Matters Study

Dr. Harrison outlined the Culture Matters study currently being conducted. There is an executive summary of this study included in this material that encapsulates the methods and issues being examined. Dr. Harrison postulated the following likely results of this study:

- There is no silver bullet or panacea that can be done to significantly transform countries/cultures

- Culture changes slowly, but it might be possible to accelerate this process
- Key roles of reform in the following areas:
- Education, particularly literacy particularly women's literacy, the kind that results from 8-10 years of schooling
- Media, more responsible role must be taken
- Religion, particularly in terms of women's roles and support for free market
- Indispensability of leadership, there must strong and committed people in positions of power who can affect change
- Need for more emphasis on civic education
- Research might identify some generalizations about what interventions could work in multiple countries

Conclusion

Dr. Harrison cited the economic growth leading to democratization in various East Asian countries as a function of their Confucian values that emphasizes the value of work and long run time focus. He also pointed to the success of a number of ethnic minority groups, particularly the Chinese, who seem to excel economically in diverse environments as a result of their culture and values. Overall Dr. Harrison concluded that the key to progress is the promotion of progressive values. These values must be promoted during child rearing as wells as in schools, the media and through religion. This is a complex and slow process that must originate inside a country to be effective however, Dr. Harrison contends that it is a necessary but not sufficient means to accomplish lasting economic and political development.

Discussion

A variety of questions and issues were raised during the discussion period. Among them:

- Role of development is not to push countries to adopt progressive values, outside entities must wait for domestic demand to develop before acting
- In many countries there is no hope for economic development without globalization, therefore arguments against globalization are just destructive for the poor in developing countries
- An example of cultural change is the growth of Protestantism in Latin America, mainly women are converting to a different way of life that is a signal to their commitment to upward mobility
- In countries like Nicaragua there must be a commitment by the people of the country and the leadership to change especially to eliminate corruption in order to attract the level of investment that they need to develop, investment is predicated on cultural change
- The first step in many countries should be increased emphasis on education particularly for women as a means to affect progressive cultural change
- It is impossible to build democracy in places that are not congenial to it, transplanting institutions is not enough
- Attitudes of people in the Islamic world today is similar to the dependency theory that has dominated thinking in Latin America, where people blame others for their problems instead of taking responsibility for them

- Although cataclysmic events have a profound effect on cultural development, for instance the effect of the Spanish Civil War on Spain or the effect of Martin Luther's 95 Theses on what is now Germany, it is difficult to figure out how interventions could take advantage of the opportunities for cultural change
- Strong leadership is essential, aid organizations can provide them with a menu of options of what they can do to change their cultural only after the leadership comes to the realization that this is what they want to do